

National Education Association Oral History Project
Interview with Ken Melley
Conducted on January 19, 2017 by Vakil Smallen

VS: It's January 19, 2017. This is Vakil Smallen, and I'm sitting down with Ken Melley to do an oral history interview about his time at NEA from, – my dates are correct here, from 1969 through –

KM: Sixty-eight.

VS: From 1968 through?

KM: Nineteen ninety-seven.

VS: Nineteen ninety-seven, okay, great. So, unless you have something you want to start with, I have a couple of kind of intro questions here.

KM: No, the only thing is I have some affection toward GW and the political school that was established there. I went along with Jerry TerHorst. I was one of the cofounders of the Graduate School for Political Management.

VS: Oh, I did not know that.

KM: Yeah, and it started in New York City. My mind skips. Well, anyway, that's where we were. We started at CCNY, and then it expanded such, and there was interest at GW in

being in DC, a lot closer to government that the university established this separate school for graduates in political science. I don't know what you call it now.

VS: Off the top of my head, I don't know. So what year was that, if you don't mind my asking?

KM: Oh, gosh, it was probably in the late seventies, early eighties.

VS: While you were still at NEA?

KM: Oh, yeah. One of the pleasures I got out of doing that was having one of the fellows who worked for me, a guy named Michael Edwards, pretty much become one of the best recognized professors in the Graduate School of Political Management.

VS: Very interesting. I'll have to pass that on. That's certainly a little tidbit of info that's worth keeping. So I guess to start off with, from your little sort of pre-interview that we had, you told me that you started off working in Connecticut at the Connecticut Education Association. Can you tell me a little bit about your role when you were there?

KM: Yeah, I joined the CEA in November or December of 1964, and my job title was Field Representative. The CEA was an organization that was recognized on Capitol Hill in Hartford, Connecticut, as having some fairly good years of accomplishment in protecting

teacher pensions and other things like that. But the fact of the matter was, the CEA was still predominantly in the hands of the school administrators, and I was one of the few hired to start changing that direction.

VS: So you were hired by CEA?

KM: I was hired by CEA.

VS: Specifically to sort of change internally?

KM: Yeah, to get things rolling, because in 1965, the state legislature and the governor of Connecticut passed Public Law whatever, 187 or something like that, that gave the opportunity to organize teachers' groups to professionally negotiate contracts with their employer. When I think back on it now, the distinction that the people who were in charge of the CEA at the time wanted it to be professional negotiations because they didn't want to have the term collective bargaining come out. That would be too unionized for them to represent.

VS: There's a similar conflict, I guess, in the NEA, and you see that the use of professional negotiations is the term that is definitely preferred early on.

KM: Early on, yeah. It was bargaining, but they preferred negotiations because it sounded a lot more professional. So in '65, the law passed, and I was hired to go to different school districts in Connecticut to organize the teachers into some type of a group that would then petition the school board to sit down and be recognized and start bargaining the contract. In the beginning, what was bargained, pretty much, was salary. The other benefits, pension, came from the state legislature. Health care was not considered to even be on the table at the time. School districts would provide it, but you had to pay for it as a member of the group.

So that was the beginning of the transition. This exact same thing was happening in Michigan, New Jersey, Wisconsin, and there was one other. So it was building throughout the country, slowly but surely. I negotiated contracts, and the dispute resolution was to go through a process which was called arbitration. They had it backwards. They called it arbitration, and the second step, if arbitration failed, was called mediation. But no one wanted to talk about work stoppages and strikes. We didn't do it at that time.

One of the districts I worked in was in Norfolk, Connecticut, and we had a total of nine teachers in the union. That's all. It was an elementary through junior high school district. Their students then went to another place for high school. So that was a prototype, and we had a model type of negotiation agreement that we would love to have in our hands when we'd go to other districts. So that's what we did. We made it a much

more expansive definition of what was allowed at the time. We benefitted from the fact that I think it was four or five of those, women teachers, all married, all with children were members of the school board in Norfolk, Connecticut, so it provided us the opportunity to exercise what the law provided.

So we did not reach an agreement right at the outset, so we went to the first step of arbitration. The first step of arbitration, we brought somebody in who was defined as – I think it was an attorney – and we still didn't reach agreement. So we went to the second step, the final step, which was called mediation, and that involved meeting with the Connecticut state superintendent of schools. He was the chief mediator for the 167 districts in Connecticut. His name was William Saunders. Through this process, he recognized that what we were doing was reasonable. So we came out of that process – it took about a year – with a contract in hand that had a duration of one year. But that was the beginning, from my point of view.

VS: So just a step back a second, I've always been curious logistically, you talk about how you were brought into Connecticut as a result of this law that allowed for public bargaining as the association was sort of undergoing a transition, I guess. At the same time, as you say, they were happening in other states and also happening in the NEA itself. I've always been curious; this law obviously provides an impetus for the association to behave differently, to start supporting professional negotiation/collective bargaining, but it was still being run at the top by the administrators.

KM: Pretty much.

VS: So I guess logistically, how exactly – like the administrators, were they allowing it to happen? Did they kind of recognize it needed to change? Were they being pushed out? What was happening inside the organization?

KM: A combination of all that. I think many of them recognized that the time had come, that there was a tremendous amount of pressure on the part of the employer organizations to gain some type of community recognition. Slowly but surely, the people at the top of the state associations, who really were administrators, either resigned or retired, and gradually, the replacement of individuals in their stead represented more of the membership of the teachers. That was another thing; the different state laws defined who was eligible to be in the bargaining units.

At the beginning, the Connecticut law did not exclude administrators, but it did three or four years later, with an amendment to the law. But in Michigan and New Jersey, it excluded membership by any administrator, so principal, assistant principal, or anyone who had a position in the district considered administration. So it was the beginning. The boiling of the pot, so to speak, was just starting at that time. I've often said, from my point of view, my interest, I mean, I was a young father. By 1965, we had four young children. Making payday was hard as a teacher. That's why the incentive to go with the

CEA was a double barreled one for me. It would give me more money in the end of the career versus what I would make staying as a teacher.

VS: So you had been a teacher previously and transitioned?

KM: Yeah, a high school teacher. I had organized our local and pretty much went through the steps that eventually became law before the law. We did it. We went to the state superintendent of public schools. And one of the most famous days in my memory, the superintendent of schools in Windsor, Connecticut, was Dr. Earle Russell, and he was the boss. Everybody knew he was the boss of the whole district. He'd been there forever, and it was his school district, and you weren't going to be messing with it.

Well, we had organized the teachers, and we organized them not only for the purpose of representing them, but to make them join the organization. There was no requirement that they join. So we put every school up on the wall with the name of every teacher, and put a mark next to whether they just joined the local or the state or the national, or all three. So it was sort of like we converted a high school cafeteria for the moment to be like a union hall.

The superintendent of schools came barging into the meeting that I was running, and he threw a document on the desk and he said, "I'm not going to do this. This is not what they pay me for." Well, he lost that argument. It was the wrong thing to do at the right

time. So everybody saw this guy, you know, we're not going to get anywhere if he's the boss. So that started it and that churned your juices. So that was Connecticut.

VS: So the transition from Connecticut to the national association, were you headhunted, so to speak, by NEA?

KM: Yeah, I was recruited by NEA.

VS: Because of your background of collective bargaining, professional negotiation?

KM: Right.

VS: So were you brought in specifically to handle a new professional negotiation department?

KM: No, the job I first had was we had an organizing team. We called it the flying squad, and basically I hired two other fellows. The three of us spent the next couple of years just going to every district where there was a problem, trying to resolve the negotiation process or the system and the job action. Job actions came in all forms and types. Just a group worked to rule, type of thing. Then we had strikes, so we had to support strikes as the national supporting our local. That evolved into a fund called the National Teachers' Assistance Fund, so that we made finances available for individuals to get loans, should they miss a payday because of a job action. That endured for the next twenty years. It

was a very useful device. We just were more or less the broker between the bargaining unit and the banking institutions, usually in their own district, guaranteeing loans, and in some instances, paying the interest of the loans. But the teacher would have to pay the principal back, so that really helped us a lot.

Portland, Oregon, was a problem, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Phoenix, Buffalo, New York, Wilmington, Delaware, and we would go from place to place. Then when we weren't doing something like that, we were working in the state association trying to get the concept of unification of membership established, because at that time, it still wasn't required. That was a big piece of our business, to say we're here to help, but you've got to help, too.

VS: So when you say places like Albuquerque and Buffalo and Wilmington were problems, do you mean those were places where a strike came into place?

KM: A strike would come into place, or a challenge would come from the American Federation of Teachers for the right to bargain and be represented there. So we'd have some type of an election process, depending upon the state law, to recognize a bargaining agent. The one that sticks out in my memory was Hawaii, because it was just one bargaining unit for the whole state. We had an election there, I think it was 1969 or 1970, where AFT and NEA were on the ballot through our state association organizations, and both organizations threw everything we had into it. Fortunately, we

won that election, and so to this day, the association is still the representative in Hawaii.

But it could have gone to AFT. I mean, it was a close election.

VS: So related to that, I guess, and in some ways I guess that point sort of answers this next question, but five, ten years before the events you're talking about, NEA was still very opposed to negotiations, at least from what the records say.

KM: Yeah, it was not a part of their –

VS: So this was all fairly new. Was there a sense, then, that NEA kind of had to prove credibility as a union, rather than a professional association? Or had that already happened?

KM: No, because AFT's argument was we were just a professional organization, milk and cookies type of thing; you know, having teas instead of going down to have a beer type of thing. It was an impression that was backed up by reality up through the late sixties, early seventies. I think in one of the documents I gave you, the concept of unification became critical to the survival of NEA in this environment. A constitutional convention was voted upon in 1970, and a new constitution was adopted in 1972 to go into effect in 1974. In 1974, if you were joining the local, you had to join the state and national. That was the unification message. When the organizing team went into an environment where

we were helping a local or state, one of the conditions was that they would work actively within their governance, statewide, to get to the stage of unification.

So we supported them in that regard. Those were interesting times. We disaffiliated Missouri because they refused to unify. Therefore, we had to create another state organization, Missouri NEA, which we did. That was part of my job, too.

VS: I do want to actually go a little bit more into unification in a second, but just to kind of continue with the previous question, was there, in your sense, a one significant victory or some significant victory or victories that helped give NEA credibility at that time when they were in this kind of battle of ideas with AFT?

KM: I think Denver would be the classic one. It was a real – it preceded Hawaii. It preceded Portland. The Denver Classroom Teachers Association was well organized. They had a couple of people on staff, called one an executive director and an assistant executive director. The AFT was making head roads in Denver to challenge this Denver Classroom Teachers Association. The uniqueness of that was DCTA did not allow – this is before all this unification – did not allow administrators to join. They were one of the few associations where administrators were barred from joining.

So that was a collective bargaining election, and we fortunately won that. I think that was keystone to other activities, including going to the state association, their annual

assembly, and the DCTA demanded that they be recognized and that the unification of Colorado be on the ballot at this convention. It was adopted, resulting in the state executive director retiring or resigning, resulting in several other administrators being ineligible to join after that. So Denver would be one I'd point out specifically, and one that we worked very hard on. In fact, when I was in Connecticut, I was asked to go help Buffalo in their first job action, which was I believe in 1966. So Buffalo became a key element for us through the rest of the couple of decades, because AFT dominated in New York, primarily, except for Buffalo, and we had Buffalo in our –

VS: I know that there had been a history in New York City involving AFT and NEA. I think that had been one that NEA had ultimately lost.

KM: Oh, yeah. We lost because the organization – that was in 1963 – because the organization was predominantly in the control of the school administrators, who wanted to bargain themselves. So New York City did go AFT, and that sent a very strong message throughout the country to other urban locals to say if they can do it in New York, why can't we do it here? Then our battle was, well, don't go to the federation. Go to the association to help you battle it.

We lost New Haven, Connecticut, Hartford, Connecticut. If I were a teacher, I would have voted for the AFT at the time. So when we won Denver, it was a big win, and it propelled us into other urban centers with some credibility, because we ended up with a

bargain contract that covered all aspects of work – working conditions, and salary and benefits, and arbitration processes, so that was it.

VS: So going back to unification, so UniServ is everywhere in the documents, and I've never really understood exactly what UniServ is, so this is a perfect opportunity for me to find out more. UniServ is sort of related to unification, right? It was a sort of program to facilitate that, so can you explain a little bit about what UniServ was?

KM: The detail of it is probably boring, but the fact of the matter is, in 1970, in San Francisco, the NEA had its annual convention. At this convention, there was a real battle between two individuals to be president of the NEA. One was Janet Dean, and she was from Miami. The other was, I think, George Fischer. He was from Iowa. The battle centered around what was happening in the states, that we have to have a more unified organization to sustain us financially to deal with these issues.

So, introduced into the convention was a measure to raise the dues from I think it was \$15 to \$25. This is just the national dues. The intention of the money was to support the organizing of membership. There was – adopted a caveat for supporting that dues increase, and the caveat was well, when you bring it back to the 1971 NEA representative assembly, where as a second vote of the dues increase was required – it has to take two votes – you also have to present us with a program of support in our locals. So in the interval between '70 and '71, NEA assigned a couple of fellows. One was Arleigh

Greenblatt. He went around the country talking to all the organizations and their leaders, and he developed a program where NEA would have its dues increase but would support any local or state hiring people to do this job of negotiations. That would be called UniServ.

UniServ is really just a staff program. It was intended to bring staff on board to help bargaining the contracts. Well, for whatever reason, and this may sound selfish, I was tapped to run the UniServ program when it was adopted in 1971. Frankly, I didn't know that much about it and how it was going to work, and it was just at the beginning stages. We're at this representative assembly, and George Fischer was now the president. He called upon me to explain what UniServ was. Well, hell, I was having trouble explaining it to myself, so explain it to 9,000 people.

The bottom line was, if you had 1,200 unified members in a district, we would provide, I believe it was \$7,500 towards the salary and benefits for hiring somebody. If you didn't have 1,200 members in your school district, you could meet up with other school districts in your neighborhood to combine and make a unit, and it would be called the UniServ unit. And NEA's \$7,500 and your dues collection and the state's contribution – that's our clock, by the way; it's not a real bird, in case you're listening – we would then help you hire somebody. The hiring process was pretty much up to us, the NEA could initiate, but the person hired had to really be accepted by the local and the state, especially if they were putting some money into it.

We also set aside money to train that person; \$1,500 a year would go toward whatever training program we established for these UniServ representatives. The kicker was, if the local was unified and the national participated in unification and the state did not want unification, we would still fund that local. But it was called a readiness unit and it would only get \$6,000 versus the \$7,500. So that more or less energized those folks in those states where the state did not unify to say, hey, come on, we've got to join together. So UniServ came into existence at the 1971 representative assembly, and by 1972, we had hired a couple hundred people. At each representative assembly, we called it the body shop, where we would bring in those locals looking to hire somebody and those who would like to be hired. We would facilitate sort of an employment agency.

So that's how UniServ got started. I ran that for the next several years, while doing other things. It was set in motion. I put some numbers down in the paper that I gave you. We had over 1,000 staff members by 1980 or something like that, and they were called UniServ. After a bit, some of the states really got into it, like New Jersey. So New Jersey said, well, we're not going to fund this unless the person works for the state association. Of course, we said fine; the idea is to get someone to work at that local level.

VS: So going back a bit, you mentioned that Missouri was disaffiliated for not joining, or not unifying. So with the process of unification, what were some major road blocks? What

was the sort of timeline? I'm assuming at some point, all fifty states, or at least forty-nine states were unified. So was there like a timeline for that?

KM: Yeah, by 1974, at the representative assembly, you had to be unified national, state, and local.

VS: So Missouri was the only road block to that?

KM: They did not buy into it, and so we disaffiliated the Missouri State Teachers Association at that meeting, and the dissidents in that state organization who wanted to be unified formed the Missouri NEA. The Missouri NEA still exists today, I believe. It's a viable organization.

VS: Does the Missouri State Teachers Association?

KM: They probably have a token organization, but they disappeared from the scene as far as any activity is concerned with locals. We didn't have any real problem with them.

VS: So just some things I sort of noticed, just doing a little pre-research. I came across a folder called evaluation workshop UniServ training. This folder, it appears to be about teacher evaluations, and it was sort of guidelines for teacher evaluations, I guess. But it ties into UniServ training. So just off the top of your head, if you remember, what role

would something like teacher evaluation – how would that have related to UniServ, exactly?

KM: Well, it would relate through collective bargaining contract, how teachers are going to be evaluated by their bosses. The UniServ individual would probably be the one negotiating the contract. If he or she were not directly negotiating the contract, they would be supporting the local person who was negotiating the contract. The teacher evaluation was always a part of the final bargaining agreement. That's how it fit in.

VS: Okay. So I guess, kind of transition here into talking about NEA PAC. So I guess, to begin with, it was '74 you said was the year that NEA PAC started, right, as a result of a law allowing – so we're I guess clarifying political donations.

KM: Yeah. It was 1974, and it was – I think, again, if my memory is correct, our national representative assembly voted a resolution that our government relations organization would get involved in selecting candidates who were inclined to vote the way the national wanted. In that time there were really no limits. There was no what we have today. Well, I don't know what we have today because it's a real screwed up mess. But NEA PAC came into existence the first year by having a raffle at the representative assembly. That money that was raised at the raffle for what was given away – I don't remember at that time – but that money went toward supporting candidates that the national thought would be advantageous to our agenda and the Hill. But if you'll recall, 1974 was a real

rupture as far as politics were concerned. That was when Nixon was getting kicked out and Ford came in, and there was a whole change in the Congress. I mean, it's a major turnover in the House of Representatives to the Democrat Party.

That's when one of our agendas was to get a national collective bargaining bill through, but that was the target. Never accomplished; we never did it. But it was the argument we used at the onset, so that's how NEA PAC began. I was still an organizer in the UniServ program, but I had a couple other people help me. I was just bouncing in and out of other problems for that time. So 1974 was a revolution as far as NEA was concerned, because that's when unification came into existence.

VS: Unification came into existence and NEA PAC. So it was only in 1969, from my reading of it, that the NEA sort of publically took a position on a candidate for office. It was a Supreme Court nominee.

KM: It was Haynsworth and Carswell.

VS: I guess he had some rulings in favor of segregation, of integration.

KM: He was absolutely an anti-integrationist. That's true of Carswell and Haynsworth. Yeah, that happened, and NEA did oppose them. But it wasn't the key, I think, that brought

about legislative activity on the national level. It was the whole business of what was happening at the state level bubbling up to the national and really popping through in '74.

VS: So by 1974, the sort of increased visibility and increased vulnerability that came with taking public positions on candidates, the NEA was much more comfortable with that role?

KM: Right, yeah, and obviously, as time went by, the next year or so, the candidates for president to be elected in 1976 starting sowing their seeds. That's when NEA did endorse, for the first time ever, a candidate for national office. It happened to be Jimmy Carter. One of the issues that we promoted for his endorsement was that he said he would work to establish a separate Department of Education at the national level. That was the key ingredient to getting our members to endorse him.

I think as you saw in the record, 1979, that department was created. Very disappointingly, he lost his reelection bid. It was a real – I may be jumping ahead, but we had a real battle then, because in 1980, Ted Kennedy decided to challenge Jimmy Carter for the nomination of the party. We had told everybody that Carter supported the Department of Education and he delivered, and we're new in this business, and if we back off him now, no one will ever trust our support in the future, even though Ted Kennedy was a hundred-percenter in everything we believed in and did. It was very hard to do. So the rest was history when Reagan beat Carter.

VS: I do actually want to talk about that a little bit later, so maybe we'll get a chance to go back to reference some of those things. But just kind of, I guess, sticking with the timeline here, just on a very general level, I noticed you opened your book, or I guess the chapter twelve of the thing you shared with me, talking about the twentieth century sort of as a time of violence juxtaposed against progress. Just on a very meta level, how do you see NEA and your time at NEA kind of fitting into that picture?

KM: Well, concurrent to all this unification work and looking back into the sixties and before, NEA pretty much recognized segregated organizations. Where there was a state association, there was also a state black association or African American association. That merger came together in 1966, 1967, but it was hard to achieve in some states. It was a real battle. So the bringing together of the black and white organizations was a battle. The bringing together of the unification in some states was a battle. You'll read about the sixties; you know we had violence. There were terrible things happening in the District of Columbia, assassinations, and everything seemed to be going wrong then.

VS: Just looking back, I guess, and again, I'm just trying to get on an umbrella level here. But at the same time NEA was sort of moving in this direction in a very meaningful, forceful way, do you feel like at the time, there was a sense of optimism and positivism about the role that NEA was playing, and that they were sort of pushing things in a good direction, and things were happening for them positively?

KM: Well, I do think that was the case. Out of the chaos, organizing became central. Yeah, that was central to NEA's existence for quite a while. The Department of Education, somebody introduced that way back in the fifties or sixties, there should be a separate department for education.

VS: The earliest I could find in the records is 1920. Someone in 1920 had made a reference to it.

KM: It goes way back. So it wasn't an end-all, be-all, but it presented itself to be that way when we entered the political arena. As you know, in today's current climate, talking about the Department of Education, we still only give 6 or 7 percent of the finances for school districts at the local level. So it played a very – how can I say it? The role we played about the Department of Education wasn't really representative of where school districts were going at the time, and to me, that was always a challenge. Especially when Carter – he didn't consult us when he appointed the first secretary of education. Her name was Shirley Hudsing, or something like that. She was a judge. Shirley Huffington? No.

VS: I think it's Hufflinger. I remember reading that.

KM: Shirley Hufflinger, thank you. You know, everybody said, well, Carter brought the Department of Ed., and NEA wanted the Department of Ed., so now NEA is going to run the Department of Ed. Well, that did not happen.

VS: At the time, was there a sense that Carter didn't want to seem like he was giving in to the NEA too much?

KM: I think, yeah, he recognized that. I told his staff, you know, it will just take one wrong step and we're with Kennedy. I mean, we have to be. The people who were organizing for Kennedy in the NEA were good people, many of them my friends, and many I believed in.

VS: So a lot of talk about between the sort of two Democratic candidates, within the organization, deciding which democratic candidate to go with. Was there a sense during this time that NEA PAC was forming, unification was happening, and there's a turn towards negotiation or bargaining? Was it becoming more partisan? Was it very openly aligning with the Democrats?

KM: Not intentionally. I think not intentionally. At the time, and we tried to use a sample, the political philosophy of about a third of our members was definitely progressive, more than likely would vote democrat. A third of our members were definitely conservative, very conservative, some of them. Then there were about a third who really didn't express

a partisan position. We always raised the issue of we are not a Democratic Party organization. We are independent of any individual party, and it just so happened that the Democratic Party candidates were supportive of many of the positions we supported.

I've been asked many times, would you have supported a Republican candidate for president? Well, we would have, had someone come along, who was somewhat progressive. But that didn't happen. It didn't happen with Reagan. It didn't happen with George H.W. Bush, whatever. No, we countered that all the time – encountered it, rather. Any interview that I was asked to do publically about that issue, I always insisted that we were nonpartisan. We had a lot of people who believed in the Democratic Party in the organization.

VS: So again, just a logistical question. NEA PAC was an effort to sort of centralize lobbying at the national level, right? So sort of rather than having states sort of individually try and maybe influence legislators, NEA PAC allowed the association itself to kind of do national lobbying so that issues could be focused on, candidates could be focused on, things like that.

KM: Yeah, and that was a battle. Some of the state associations recognized the potential of a national organization endorsing or not endorsing a candidate for their state. That could be a problem. But it never was, primarily because the central issue of endorsement originated at the local or the state. When it originated at the national level, it was in a re-

election, the candidate previously endorsed, based upon the record of that candidate relative to what NEA called the legislative agenda of the organization. So I mean, that's how it played out.

VS: So would NEA PAC be primarily focused on candidates for national office? Or would they go and endorse?

KM: Only national. That made the difference, and the battle for NEA PAC funds sort of internal competition. The states had their own state political action committees, and they wanted money to support the candidates for their state capitol, their governor and so on. So we knew there was competition for the dollar from the member. We had to find unique ways to separate the need for the national and the need for the state money. I think you probably recognized at the national level, we spent a lot of time to get payroll deduction for NEA PAC. Some states allowed it. Some did not.

Our big fundraiser of the year was that representative assembly, starting I think in 1980, where we had a giveaway. We'd raffle off a car. It couldn't be called a raffle. That was against the rules of NEA PAC. Anyone who was a member could have their name in the hat. They would not be required to give any contribution. But the fact of the matter is, there was sufficient enough peer pressure, competition to raise some money.

VS: I remember reading about that in here. So in the records, NEA PAC is often tagged or referred to as Teachers in Politics, so just a little clarification on what the slogan maybe referred to. I mean, it was professionals, lobbyists, sort of people like you, people with connections to legislators working at the national level. It wasn't so much about mobilizing individual teachers to support issues or anything like that.

KM: Right, at the time. TIP, that was Teacher in Politics, preceded NEA PAC.

VS: Oh, it did? Okay.

KM: Yeah.

VS: That was what came before, okay. So I guess I saw that somewhere and I confused them.

KM: No, you're right. I haven't thought of that in a while.

VS: So do you have any memory of any issues or any candidates or anything that NEA PAC, other than the president and the Department of Education and things like that, any other significant kind of candidates they endorsed or anything comes to mind?

KM: Well, I sure do have a lot; pulling it out may be little bit difficult. We had very close relationships with several members of the House of Representatives who were on the

education and labor committee. Pat Williams from Montana, in particular, Patrick Williams, was a very strong supporter of public education. We asked him to go around and help us sometimes raise money. On the Senate level, I mentioned Kennedy. Kennedy was – in fact, just as an anecdote, when the 1982 election was held and he was reelected to the Senate, he called me at home and said, “I have a choice to make, a decision to make. Should I go on the Ed and Labor Committee or the Appropriations Committee?” I said, “If I were you, I’d go on the Ed and Labor committee because that’s where you’d be most –” Now this is two years after we didn’t endorse him for president. We chatted a while longer, and the next day, he publically said he was going to be on the Ed and Labor Committee, and he ended up chairing that. So that was supportive. Let’s see. There were several others.

VS: Was there any sort of focus on issues or bills as opposed to candidates, endorsing candidates?

KM: Well, the issues were the funding issues. Title I issues at the time were critical, so that was the primary effort that the NEA put forward through people we had endorsed who served on key committees. I’d have to look back at the roles of the members, but we had a lot of support, a lot of support. But we also had Jesse Helms, who blocked everything in the Senate for quite a while. His ability to filibuster was very critical to any progress being made. Who was the guy from Florida? Senator Smathers? No, I’m sorry. I just don’t remember at this moment.

VS: Yeah, that's okay. Earlier on, you had talked about competition with AFT when you were doing the professional negotiations and trying to do unification. So was competition with ideological allies like AFT – was that a driver behind any of the sort of NEA PAC endorsements? Or was that – I mean, was there a sense of working together?

KM: Well, the classic one was AFT endorsed Ted Kennedy in 1988. But for the most part, any other endorsement that – I would say 95 percent of the time, we probably would endorse the same candidates. The only difference was we had a real rural representation in our organization that they did not. They were centered in the urban centers of the country. We had pretty much – I used to say we had members in every congressional district that we could call on, and we knew who they were, and AFT couldn't do that. Their primary strength was in the cities.

In the end, it's funny now. Here we are; I'm retired. One of my best friends in the political arena was the person opposite my job at the AFT all those years, because we thought the same. If you took the labels away, you wouldn't know the difference. It just happened to be that way. In a totally different arena, maybe someone will talk to you on that whole business of affiliating with the AFL CIO. That was the big push from those in the NEA who wanted to be more closely aligned with the labor districts. That never happened.

VS: So since you've brought up the AFT a couple of times, I'll sort of skip ahead here to some other questions about them. In 1998, just after you left, there was some talk of a merger between AFT and NEA, and so I'm assuming this is something that had been brewing for some time.

KM: Yeah.

VS: Do you have any kind of background to how that started to come about?

KM: Yeah. They were – well, one night, three of us were sitting down having a beer, a general counsel named Bob Chanin, executive director named Don Cameron, and myself. There was rumor in the air, talk in the air about should we get together? Would we be better together or opposed with one another? We thought, at the time, it would – in fact, Bob, Don and I said the best thing we could do now is merge with the AFT, and we'd really be a good organization. Don Cameron, who was the executive director, was the one who brought that message to the executive committee, the elected leadership of the NEA at the time, and it was supported. It was right when I was leaving, at the time.

They did negotiate. They had several meetings, but they could never pull together a final format that represented both organizations' needs. But there had been what we say quasi-mergers, like in New York State, where AFT dominated. Our organization, which in any

other state would be a substantial number of people, they agreed to work together and for all practical purposes did merge.

VS: You mean the sort of affiliates kind of merged?

KM: Yeah, they all did in New York.

VS: So I guess before this meeting that you had, this over beers that the topic came up, had there been any previous discussion of the merger?

KM: Oh, there had. There was all along the line. Yeah, there was, in fact, a group of urban leaders within the NEA who would regularly bring that topic up at an executive committee level that we should merge with the AFT. There was some reason, and I could never pinpoint it. They used the argument, well, we don't want to affiliate with the AFL CIO at the local level because they're doing this and that's not helping us. So it was an issue all through the eighties that we should think about doing joint ventures and we should think about sharing endorsements of candidates. So that was happening. It was always on somebody's mind who had a decision-making capacity within the organization and just couldn't complete it.

VS: I know in the 1997, 98 handbook, the NEA staff handbook, it mentions that the NEA reaffirms its longstanding goal to unite all education organizations under one national

association. So, had this been a sort of official goal though? Is this something where the NEA like took an official position?

KM: We took the position. What do you call it in the world when something – management by objectives or something? It was our standard position, but that was the one that would be changed in 1998, somehow. But as I said, I separated from that. I don't know exactly, step-by-step what happened after.

VS: So to what degree, then, was – you talk about the talk of sharing endorsements and things like that all through the eighties. During that time, was the AFT generally seen as an ally, generally seen as a competitor? Was there a desire to be sort of first out of the gate? How did the relationship work?

KM: State by state, there were strong bonds between the state AFT and the state NEA in several of our organizations. It did not apply that directly to the national that much, only in key endorsements. But where it happened the most was at the state level. There were a lot of agreements reached that were a mutual understanding of working together, not competing for membership. That's what it came down to. We had the wave of bargaining elections and affiliation decisions in the seventies and early eighties. Then it ended, pretty much.

I don't think there has been an election for representation of a unit since I left. I think that's all put to bed. I would imagine in this day and age – this is well beyond the subject of our discussion today – it's probably in the best interest of both organizations at that local level and state level to work together, to be one. In these days, it's hard as heck to get your point recognized.

VS: I found a comment in 1977, an NEA delegate from Pennsylvania said that minority teachers lived mostly in Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania and they were represented by AFT. So going back to something that you had said earlier, how AFT primarily was in the cities whereas NEA was kind of spread throughout, do you recall that AFT, either in reality or perception, was more likely to represent minority teachers?

KM: No. No, in our organization, we had a very strong representation of minority teachers. Primarily, at the time, they were African American. When you think back about – I think it was 1984 or 1985. No, excuse me. At first, it was – when NEA had presidents who served only for a year, they'd serve in president elect for a year and then president for a year. There was an African American president elected in the seventies.

VS: James Harris?

KM: James Harris, yeah. But he just – I mean, he was in the line, so to speak. He ran in a competitive race, and he won. The next African American was Mary Futrell. By that

time, the term of an elected president was extended, I believe, to two three-year terms, or it was maybe two two-year terms. It ended up two three-year terms, as maximum. But I think Mary served for four years. Going back to the fifties and sixties, there was a fellow, Braulio Alonso from Florida. He was Cuban American.

VS: Sixty-eight, I think, was when he became –

KM: Yeah, and he was an example of the transition president who was an administrator. He was an assistant principal at a high school in Florida. But he was one of the transition presidents that helped us become a teacher organization. He was Cuban, I believe. Since that time, Reg Weaver was elected president. If you were to go now to an NEA representative assembly, now that they've expanded the membership into support personnel, those who work in support systems of administration, secretaries or health workers or janitorial services. So the local in many places represents all of those and it has a strong minority contingent.

I remember the argument was, well, one out of every three elections, there should be a minority on the – elected, and you can't do that. That's not how an organization runs. So that was always a discussion, but it never became a policy issue.

VS: So you mentioned Braulio Alonso and his sort of being one of those transition positions. Sort of going back to some of that era, because of something that you mentioned in the

chapters you gave me. You mention the 1970 RA as a sort of watershed moment in NEA history, and the 1969 RA is when – if memory serves, as you put, a major urban affiliate presented a platform for what became the constitutional convention. That was in 1969, right?

KM: Yes.

VS: And so, from my reading prior to that, Richard Batchelder's election in '66 was sort of the first watershed moment of this change, because if memory serves, he was a teacher, not an administrator?

KM: He was a teacher administrator. He did both.

VS: He did both, okay.

KM: Up in Newton, Massachusetts. He was called a house master. That was his job.

VS: That was his title.

KM: Yeah.

VS: So to touch on Batchelder, at the time, you would have been in Buffalo, right?

KM: Yeah.

VS: Do you recall the sort of effect that that election might have had?

KM: Oh, yeah. It was very, very positive because he had a very – he was a dynamic speaker. He could present an advocacy issue-oriented piece. In fact, you may have read about it, at the time, Batch was instrumental in bringing the black national organization together with NEA. It started in Batchelder's period of his presidency. I think they were called the American Teachers Association, ATA, and NEA merged, and Batchelder and Braulio were a part of that.

VS: Yeah, I knew that happened in '66. So he was a big driver in making it happen as well, during his time there?

KM: Yeah.

VS: Go ahead if you have more to say.

KM: Yeah. Shortly after he left the office of president, he worked out and worked for the California Teachers Association, and he became the – as the staff person, he was the head of the Southern California Teachers Association. They divided their state up into units,

which included Los Angeles, and they were raising holy hell with local affiliates. They were very, very active and very progressive in Southern California. That was the time when UTLA, United Teachers of Los Angeles, they had a couple of strikes in the late sixties, I think it was, and Batch was a part of the organization that brought that about.

Just as a side note, he went to Florida after that and became the executive director of our affiliate in Florida. That's when he started to merge the AFT state and the NEA state, in opposition to what the national desire at the time, which was he would have accepted affiliation of AFL CIO. Our policy said that that was sufficient enough to disaffiliate an organization, which we did. Eventually, we disaffiliated FEA and created some silly name. I forget the name in Florida. FUSA, Florida United State –

VS: State Teachers Association?

KM: Yeah, something like that.

VS: FUSTA.

KM: It was some crazy name, which eventually – so we did disaffiliate FEA at that time, and Batch was their leader. So all of a sudden, here this guy was so supportive of what we opposed. Again, he was a friend. I mean, I knew him like a brother. We could talk to one another. But he was determined. He was very effective in presenting his issues.

VS: So skipping ahead a little, you then mentioned in your document that in '69, someone who was running for NEA president, a candidate for NEA president, presented what became the platform for a constitution –

KM: Yeah, Janet Dean.

VS: It was Janet Dean, okay, yeah, you mentioned her earlier. Then I know you had touched on the 1970 RA, probably about an hour or so ago, as this watershed moment in history. But can you just recap some of that? Like, what made that RA so significant?

KM: That RA is where the dues increase went from \$15 to \$25, where the RA adopted a resolution to have a constitutional convention, and that's where the UniServ program began. So those three elements made a difference. Of all of them, at the time, the unification issue was the key, from my point of view. The constitutional convention didn't involve staff, and I was a staff person, so they could go off, and they did. They went off and had their – and that's when they brought back a document, I think in '72, that was the new constitution. It came into effect in 1974, and it required unification. That's when Missouri got kicked off.

VS: Actually, I've not touched on the \$10 due increase. I really have a question about that. It was back in unification. I was just curious whether or not that dues increase, going along

with unification, was that a driver behind like a road block for unification? Like tying into a dues increase?

KM: No, no. That was the incentive. I mean, we're asking you to pay ten more dollars and this is what you will get for it. There was really very little resistance to that dues increase. It wasn't an issue, as long as we presented the UniServ program, and they had an ability to do it. One of the papers I gave you, I think the growth of UniServ over the next three or four years, we went from a couple hundred staff to like 1,200 staff. We had the money to bring them in and train them. They were trained at the NEA's national something. We had some title – National Training Organization. We had a curriculum, and we had people staffing that curriculum. It went soup to nuts, how to run an organization at a local level, so it brought together local affiliates to finally work with one another. If they had 200 members or 500 members, they had strength in numbers now, and they had someone professionally, full time, representing their interests.

VS: So those are the main questions I have. I have just a couple of wrap up questions. But if there's anything else you wanted to go into detail, feel free if you have other things that came up if you wanted to touch on. So first one, you know, sort of I guess a sillier one – not silly, necessarily, but you donated this collection of buttons to us. Just out of curiosity, how did you start collecting that? What was the impetus behind creating that collection?

KM: My wife knows that I sort of have a drive to collect things. I don't say it's collecting; it's accumulating. In my office at NEA, every time there was something that had a pin that you wore at it, I put it on the board, and that board grew to several hundred buttons over time. I now personally have a political button collection that is a couple of thousand pieces. It's all organized.

VS: Unrelated to NEA?

KM: Just politics, state politics, and yeah, so that's how it started. People would know that that was my interest. I'd get buttons coming in in the mail. People were mailing me from their locals if they had some type of issue organization, teachers for this, teachers for that. I went back and scoured the NEA archives. I went through the archives and found some of the stuff from years gone by. I think there's some piece in there that goes back to the early 1900s in the button collection.

VS: In your button collection, I can't remember off the top of my head, but in the NEA itself there are pins from the RAs from the 1880s. So, yeah, there's some old stuff in there, programs from there, from back then as well, so definitely old stuff. Lastly is sort of I guess a last thoughts one. Obviously, the last two decades since your retirement, we've seen a change in politics, a change in lots of things, but politics especially. What do you think are some of the long-term impacts of some of the issues that you've faced? I guess

do you see them as having been undone? Do you see still promise there? I guess your just sort of analysis of since you've left, what's happened.

KM: I don't know how I would have handled this most recent sequence of campaigns and elections, but I definitely would have been working hard not to have Donald Trump as our president. I didn't necessarily have great enthusiasm for Hillary, but it's been disappointing. There has been a lot of erosion of things I thought we had accomplished over time, and that's disappointing. They called it Title I. We worked hard on that. Now they changed the name with every new administration, No Child Left Behind being one of them, and whatever this new group will do, there will be another change.

The thing that is constant is the federal support for education is so vital in urban centers. It's not just for the money for teaching, but it's the money for kids sustaining life. In several of these school districts, they're feeding these kids breakfast and lunch now with federal money. That shouldn't happen, but it is happening. So I find that very, very disheartening. We sit here in McLean, Virginia, and my kids went to all public schools. They went to wonderful public schools and they got a good education, but our schools are still unequal in what they do. If we were in the District of Columbia, they would not have gotten the same education they got here, so I find that very just problematic, and I don't know the answer to it.

VS: I guess NEA has had a bit of a tough time, it seems like.

KM: Absolutely. It's very hard. The environment is very hard, and it will be harder now, with this woman who, if she is appointed to the head of the department of education. I know a lot of people would turn over in their graves today if they knew where this gal is coming from and what she represents.

VS: Just going back a bit for a follow up question for me, you talk about Shirley Hufflinger, I think you said.

KM: Hufstedler.

VS: Hufstedler.

KM: You said it, Hufstedler.

VS: Getting appointed to head the department and the NEA sort of – I think if I recall, you had said that they weren't necessarily opposed to her, but they didn't know anything about her. She was out of the blue.

KM: Right.

VS: So from that point on, I mean, obviously during the Reagan era, during the Bush I era, you had people like William Bennett heading the Department of Education. Did the Department of Education become almost not an ally, but an opponent of sorts for the NEA's agenda?

KM: Yes, it did. But fortunately, well, they were at the head of the department, the people you mentioned. We still had strong support in the Congress, both House and Senate, both Democratic and Republican, so a lot of their ideas didn't come to fruition because they were blocked in the Congress. But the 1980s was absolutely a defensive period where the organization, like many other entities representing public employees – I mean, just to survive and keep the enthusiasm of the members, we've got to keep doing this. Even if we lose, we have to come back and do it again.

VS: Just to sort of talk a little bit about it being maybe a different era than the era we're in today, one of the documents that I found in the collection is from 1979. It's an endorsement by Republican members of Congress of the creation of a cabinet-level Department of Education. It's kind of an open letter to their Republican colleagues, signed by twelve or fifteen Republican members of Congress, and one of the names on it is Newt Gingrich, which, anyway, I just thought was sort of funny.

KM: Yeah, it's ironic, isn't it?

VS: Yeah, and I think that in some ways highlights that we're in a very different time. I don't think you would ever see that today.

KM: I don't, either. Well, I'm glad I'm sitting here as opposed to behind a desk over there, because it's going to be very hard.

VS: Okay, well, do you have any final thoughts or anything else?

KM: No. If you have any more questions, I'd gladly respond.

[End of interview.]